Formerly it was believed that a smith owed his skill to the help of the spirit of a person whom he had killed, and wooden effigies of this person were kept by the smith.(1) 326 782

The principal products of a blacksmith's forge are axe-heads, hoe blades,(2) tools for mat-making, arrowheads, knives, and brass bracelets. Iron, which is fairly plentiful, was formerly smelted over charcoal fires.(3) Today smiths use scrap iron. 325 412

Pottery

Pot-making is a part of women's work among the Ovimbundu. A wheel is not used. Clay is mixed with a silicate, usually gravel, rolled out in long ropes, and the pot built by the coiling process.(4) Pots are ornamented when wet by making deep incisions with a piece of gourd; they are then sun-dried, and fired in a kiln of dry grass. Pots are used as water-containers, as cooking vessels and as vessels for storing corn and beans, and, when made in a very large size, for brewing beer.(5) 323 [462]

No ritual attaches to pot-making, except at the opening of a new clay-pit, when, in the presence of both men and women from the village, the medicine-man sacrifices a chicken over the open pit.(6) [782]

Weaving and Spinning

Looms have not been used among the Ovimbundu since they have been a people, although progenitors of the kingly families who came from the Bangala or Congo groups may have done weaving. Trade cloth has been known and used by the Ovimbundu for nearly 300 years.(7) Skins have been used in remote areas; Hambly when he mentions bark-cloth as being worn by the Ovimbundu is probably referring to the Ngangela. Spun cotton, however, is used for repairs, and there is a cotton plant in most gardens. Spinning is done always by men.(8) 286 439 [281] [287] [283] 462

Basketry

All girls learn to make baskets, although some become more proficient than others. Knowledge of basket-making implies also an understanding of dyeing, since coloured strands of grass are interwoven to make geometric patterns.(9) Baskets, and also basket-trays, are usually made by the coiling process.(10) 285 462 [386]

(1) Hambly, (2) 1934, pp.158-60. The ceremony was described from Njongolo village in Elende.
(2) See Cashmen, 1944, pp.140-1.
(3) For details of the blacksmith's forge and tools, see Hambly, op.cit., pp.160-1; Cashmen, 1944, pp.139, 140, 145-6.
(4) See Hambly, op.cit. Plates XXXIII and XXXIV, and Childs, 1949, Plate VIII.
(5) Hambly, op.cit., p.168; Cashmen, op.cit., pp.144-5.
(6) Hambly, op.cit., p.169.
(7) Childs, personal communication. See also Childs, 1949, p.171, note 1.
(8) See Hambly, p.177, and Cashmen, 1944, p.136.
(9) Red, yellow, black, and brown dyes are used. For a description of the process, see Hambly, op.cit., pp.170-1.
(10) See Hambly, op.cit., p.171, and Cashmen, op.cit., pp.141-2 for details of basket-making. Also for illustrations Hambly, op.cit. and Childs, 1949.

285 The name *esisa* is given to the raw material as well as to the mat. The worker begins by laying out the reeds on the ground, side by side; then the slender tool *utomo* is passed through the reeds near their ends. This position is made permanent by sewing, and the process is repeated at intervals along the length of the reeds (Plate XLII, Figs. 1, 2).

Evinda is a large mat, about 120 cm long and 70 cm wide, while each strip of coarse elephant grass is about 3 cm wide. Ability to make the rush mat (*esisa*) is fairly common, but skill in making *evinda* is less usual. The mat *evinda* has several uses; it may be stretched on the floor or bed as a sleeping mat, or possibly it is rolled so that the ends can be fastened together; so treated it forms a cylinder which may be filled with grain when stood upright on the ground. A number of these mats is sometimes used to form a temporary storage place or shelter. The technique is of the twilled variety in which each weft passes over and under two warps.

Ocala is a coarse mat made from long stalks which are called "elephant grass" by the Boers; the agricultural term is "Napier's fodder." The long rods are white and glazed, so forming an artistic contrast to the crossbinding, which is of black bark. The technique is known as check, a term used to describe a structure in which warp and weft pass over and under each other singly.

The large mat (*ocikanga*) which is of soft texture shows neatly woven, diamond-shaped patterns of dark brown grass. The technique of this mat is of the twilled variety in which each weft passes over and then under two warps.

283 String bags, which are used for suspending gourds or hanging them over the shoulder, are made by men only. The root *ombundi*, mentioned in connection with brewing beer, is used for making string bags. Two fibers that have been teased out from the root are rolled tightly together by rubbing them between the palm and the thigh. [462] Strong rope is sometimes made by plaiting coarse grass; this occupation is in the hands of males.

● 386 [531] In basket-making the preparation of dyes is of great importance because colored strands of grass are inwoven to make named geometrical patterns (Plates IX; X). The Umbundu expression for dyeing is *oku lisa olosovo*.

Red coloring is produced by taking leaves of a plant named *esava* and cooking them in water along with the bark of the tree *ukondo*. [515] *Ukondo* is the "tooth brush" tree because small pieces of its wood are chewed and used for cleaning the teeth. After the grass has

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

simmered in this infusion of *evava* leaves and *ukondo* bark, it is buried in a heap of ashes and earth. These processes produce the red coloring. 386

Yellow dye is made from the roots of a wild rhubarb (*ocilungululla*) which has sagittate leaves. The roots are pounded and mixed with cold water, after which the grass is placed in the mixture. A pot containing the mixture is put on the fire and the contents are boiled for half an hour; at the end of this time the grass is an amber-yellow in color.

In order to dye grass black the leaves of *evava*, the plant used for making red dye, are mixed with an iron solution obtained from the mud of stagnant pools. If the grass which has been cooked in this mixture is not sufficiently dark it is reboiled in the *evava*-iron mixture to which the pounded leaves of *ungalo* are added. Brown coloring is made by mixing the red dye with the yellow.

Baskets made by the coiling process are the most common type manufactured by Ovimbundu women (Plate XV, Fig. 6). The large basket *ohumba* is a woman's field basket in which she carries corn, sweet potatoes, and manioc, along with her hoe and pounder (Plate XXVIII, Fig. 2). Each coil consists of a large number of strands of fine grass which are tightly bound. The coils of the better baskets are wrapped with the grass called *osoka;* this wrapping fastens each coil to the preceding coil. Coarser baskets have the coils wrapped with strips from the leaf of the screw pine (*emañalālo*). There is a sewing process in which the coils are bound to one another with the bark *olondovi*, which is kept damp during the process. I have seen a needle, threaded with bast, used for sewing coils together; the needle was rethreaded every time it passed through a coil. Success in basket-making depends largely on the ability of the worker to keep the coils of uniform thickness. There is constant inspection and plucking out of a strand of grass here and there (Plate XXXIX, Fig. 2). 285

In making basket trays (*ongalo*), the same coiling process is followed, but the work is kept flat. These trays are used for winnowing corn. Wicker-work is used for making conical traps for small game such as hares and rats. Conical fish traps are made of wicker-work. Names of patterns, which are of a simple geometrical kind, are well known to basket-makers. Sometimes a pattern is woven round the basket at a certain height to indicate a generally accepted standard for measurement of capacity. [531]